“The thing is, there are always going to be kids like Julian who are jerks. But if a little kid like Jamie, who’s usually a nice enough kid, can be that mean, then a kid like August doesn’t stand a chance in middle school” (141).

Middle school was great! First off, I wasn’t obviously physically deformed (it takes most people awhile to catch on) and second, middle school was where the bullying *stopped*, not started. Finally, I had friends, I went to movies, had sleepovers, etc.

The year went on, and I was settled into my new group of friends. I watched my brother throughout his senior year to make sure I was doing the right thing. He was so well-liked. No one knew the special secret he had to hide. If they knew, would they look at him weirdly? Having grown accustomed to the ways of high school, I thought just how different my brother's status would be if his special needs were in plain sight. There would be no Homecoming Court nomination; let alone a Homecoming Prince victory. He wouldn't have as many friends. People might even be scared of him. I had grown up with him. I knew he was normal. It's hard to believe how different things might be for him if he were to be obvious about his unique situation.

“What I always loved most about middle school was that it was separate and different from home... But in middle school a lot of people didn’t know about August. My old friends did, of course, but my new friends didn’t. Or if they knew, it wasn’t necessarily the first thing they knew about me,” (91).

“I’m an awful person!...Yes I am! She sobs. It’s just been so nice being in a new school where nobody knows about him, you know? Nobody’s whispering about it behind my back. It’s just been so nice, Justin. But if he comes to the play, then everyone will talk about it, everyone will know...I don’t know why I’m feeling like this...I swear I’ve never been embarrassed by him before,” (203).

I was in kindergarten the first time I realized that I was “different” from the other kids in my class. Never mind the orthopedic brace on my foot that I wore to help me walk straight (it didn’t last long); that, I could ignore. What I remember is realizing that other kids could ride a bike without training wheels, and they didn’t struggle to balance on their bikes. I did. They could run, and I couldn’t (at least not well). They could kick a soccer ball with both feet, whereas I looked like an unstable toddler when I tried to use my right foot. I remember asking my parents why I couldn’t do things like everyone else, and I remember that look on their face when they finally realized, despite all their efforts, that I knew I was different—sadness, fear, and pity.

“‘It just feels so weird,’ I said, ‘to not have people talking to you, pretending you don’t even exist.’

Auggie started smiling.

‘Ya think?’ he said sarcastically. ‘Welcome to my world!’” (176).

The year went on, and I grew to realize that my friends did not have to be a singular group of similar people. I watched my brother preparing for graduation, and knew that he'd had the time of his life in high school. Yes, I found that society put limits on what type of behaviors are acceptable. You could be weird, but you couldn't let anyone see it or you had to do it in a cool manner. I knew the truth. The year went on, and I began to notice a slow drift. Like a strange magnet, my friends and I were beginning to be pulled in opposite directions. We were cheerleaders, gothic kids, nerds, band geeks, super religious, and normal. Or at least I thought I was normal. Wrong! I had fallen into a strange mixture. We were not popular, we were not losers. We were dorky, we were cool. There was no label. I was different from my brother; a popular jock.

It’s no wonder being the new kid is so hard. Like the students at Beecher Prep, my school cliques (jocks, band nerds, goody two-shoes, stoners, barbies, etc.) seemed to have brick walls surrounding them. Breaking through that wall was almost impossible, unless you met certain unwritten criteria.

I think that’s what Jack, Auggie, Miranda, Via, and Justin all learn—those walls can box you in, just as much as they box others out. Maybe that’s why Jack decides to not denounce Auggie a second time, or why Via doesn’t change to fit with Miranda again. Maybe they’ve finally figured it out and like the freedom of not be boxed in to a particular group.

“All I knew for sure is that we were all laughing and squeezing in tight against each other, and no one seemed to care if it was my face that was next to theirs or nots. In fact, and I don’t mean to brag here, but it kind of felt like everyone wanted to get close to me” (308).

It was a new year, and my brother was gone. I made it my mission to be friends with lots of different people. I knew that limiting myself to a particular clique was pointless. I knew Suzie wouldn't be a cheerleader for the rest of her life, and I knew Tommy wouldn't get any credit for being class president in five years.

“I gained entry through Eleanor to the smart-kids’ table at lunch. It was a larger group than I’d been accustomed to hanging out with, and a more diverse crowd. It included Eleanor’s boyfriend, Kevin, who would definitely become class president someday; a few techie guys; girls like Eleanor who were members of the yearbook committee and the debate club; and a quiet guy named Justin who had small round glasses and played the violin, and who I had an instant crush on” (107-108).

So maybe, just maybe, Jack, Auggie, Via, Justin, and Miranda got it right. The walls block you in more than they block others out, so screw the social boundaries and befriend who you want simply because you want to, not because you’re expected to.

“HENRY JOPLIN’S PRECEPT

Don’t be friends with jerks. - Henry Joplin” (313).

“AMOS CONTI’S PRECEPT

Don’t try too hard to be cool. It always shows, and that’s uncool. -Amos Conti” (313).